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ABSTRACT

This paper demonstrates the compatability of Aristotle's Four Causes (material, formal, efficient, and final) and George Campbell's Four Forms of Discourse (description, narration, exposition, and argumentation) and synthesizes them to form an ordered yet flexible writing model that can be used in composition instruction. Within the context of Aristotle's Four Causes, Campbell's Four Forms are treated as processes rather than products, enabling teachers to adapt and use them in the entire sequence of composition instruction, from remedial to introductory to research writing. (RL)

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"Every Poet his own Aristotle"
Or: Using the Four Causes to Teach Writing

With the general cry nowadays for processes which can help teach or re-teach basic writing skills to this generation, it may be well to begin by remembering that, as Mitford Mathews demonstrated a number of years ago, the problems of teaching to read and to write have existed since those skills were invented.[1] However, articles such as a recent one in the New York Times entitled, "Colleges are Bolstering Courses Designed to Improve Writing Ability"[2] point out causes of the current increased demand for teaching writing skills in college. Among these are television, lowered high school standards, and open college admissions. The Times article states: "For a so-called basic subject, surprisingly little research has been done on how writers work, much less how people learn the skill. It is only recently that scholars have begun to develop means of teaching writing that takes (sic) seriously the 'process'--or what is going on in the writer's head--as well as the words that result." Some of the research which needs doing involves a study of what has been done in the past, as Wayne C. Booth pointed out over ten years ago in "The Re[illegible]val of Rhetoric,"[3] where he discussed how ignorant are most professors of English about the traditional rhetorical processes, and how much we need to re-examine that tradition, as well as to synthesize it with newer processes of writing instruction.

We are already indebted to several works of scholarship which have recently contributed to the revival of traditional rhetorics and have also attempted to bridge the gap to modern relevance. In particular, Corbett's Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student[4] argues for the revival of Aristotelian rhetoric, lamenting: "Frequently the only remnant of this (rhetorical) training in the modern college is the attention paid to argumentation in a study of the four forms of discourse--Argumentation, Exposition, Description, and Narration."[5] Along the same lines, Mackin urges a revival of Platonic rhetoric in Classical Rhetoric For Modern Discourse,[6] stating that all contemporary systems of writing instruction seem, "strangely detatched from any set of basic assumptions the aspiring writer could understand or accept. . . ."[7] Howell points out in Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric[8] that dispensing with the classical rhetorics and introducing such simplifications as the Four Forms of Discourse were innovations of the last classic age of rhetoric, between 1700 and 1800 in England, and are "perhaps best interpreted as responses to the emergence of the new science."[9] Howell claims that there the tide turned from rhetoric typified by Aristotle's treatis on Rhetoric, to that typified by George Campbell's Four Forms of Discourse, so that among the revivors of traditional rhetorics, a basic question exists over whether the full, classical rhetorics of Plato and Aristotle or their challengers, the streamlined, nineteenth century models of Bacon and Campbell should be revived.

Our present study suggests that a basis for reconciliation exists, one that allows for the validity of both the ancient Greek

and the nineteenth century British rhetorical models. The New Encyclopedia Britannica mentions that much British Rhetoric was a revival of Aristotle filtered through Scottish faculty psychology, but the exact connections seem to have been lost.[9] A fact rarely discussed in this context is that Aristotle himself produced a short, four form model, known as the Four Causes. This essay attempts to demonstrate the compatibility of Aristotle's Four Causes and Campbell's Four Forms, showing that despite apparent differences between Aristotle's Material, Formal, Efficient and Final causes and Campbells' Description, Narration, Exposition and Argumentation, these seem upon closer examination to be fundamentally similar. Moreover, since Aristotle's Material and Formal causes derive from Plato's Matter and Form,[10] it seems that by reconciling the two (Aristotle and Campbell), we may at least partly reconcile Plato with them as well. And since, as Howell points out, Campbell's Four Forms indirectly derived from Bacon's Four Intellectual Arts--Inquiry, Examination, Custody, and Eloqution[11]--this would seem a reconciliation of some of the most important ancient and modern rhetorical models.

Our purpose, then, will first of all be to compare and synthesize Aristotle's Four Causes with Campbell's Four Forms. This will be done by pointing out, not a direct historical connection, because that does not seem to exist, but a comparison in the history of ideas. This fulfills a second purpose...to reinterpret Campbell's much used Four Forms, redefining them from a randomly ordered classification of types, to an elegantly ordered formula of processes. Thirdly, we will use this clarification to suggest a workable model

for the teaching of writing skills. Finally we will argue for a broad adoption of this model, and more work on developing its specific applications.

Bertrand Russell has said that "(e)ver since the beginning of the seventeenth century, almost every serious intellectual advance has had to begin with an attack on some Aristotelian doctrine. . ."[12] Rhetoricians have to this day, whether attacking or defending it, relied on Aristotle's treatis on Rhetoric. However, they seem largely to have ignored his doctrine of the Four Causes, which appears in the Metaphysics and Natural Science. These causes of any man-made object have been most often applied literally, to physical objects, the classic example being the marble statue, of which the marble is the Material cause, the concept of the statuethe Formal cause, the sculptor himself the Efficient cause, and the purpose for the statue the Final cause. However, as the Encyclopedia of Philosophy stipulates, "(i)t is, strictly speaking, not the object, but the process of change by which it comes into existence, that the doctrine of the four causes is intended to explain."[13] Thus Aristotle's categories, by definition, apply to many more processes than those the philosopher himself specified in his original examples. In fact, Aristotle did give us one precedent for using the four causes rhetorically, as John Mackin points out: "One may see an extensive use of it by Aristotle in his discussion of tragedy."[14] Furthermore, Corbett demonstrates another rhetorical application: "The differentiae in a definition often specify one or more of the four causes of a thing. . ."[15]

Thus it only remains to apply the four causes more generally to include all forms of expository writing. For the Material cause, let us substitute the basic language and concept matrix which a culture provides for describing the world. This, rather than the marble of the classic example, is the "material stuff" of expository writing, and the skill most directly connected with it is the basic act of description. Then substitute for the Formal cause of a statue, the generic type or key definitions of a piece of prose. This is a broader use of "definition" than Aristotle employs in his Rhetoric, where formal definition is merely one method of persuasion. Next, the Efficient cause--more than the writer himself--is the steps he goes through in creating a sequence of exposition for his prose. Lastly, the Final cause may be the thesis, or purpose, the end or motive for a piece of writing. To review: the Material cause relates to a writing skill we would call "description," the Formal cause to one we might name "definition," the Efficient to "exposition," and the Final to "argumentation." Obviously, we are now very close to Campbell's Four Forms of Discourse.

If we accept the above translations of Aristotle's causes into terms applicable to expository prose, we see that three of them--Description, Exposition, and Argumentation are identical. Only the Formal cause presents a problem, since it does not at first glance match with Campbell's second form of discourse--Narration. We must ask whether the Formal or definitive cause and Narration are in any meaningful sense compatible. Obviously as standardly defined they are not, which is one important reason for applying Aristotle's causes to the forms of discourse. We find that in listing the parts of a traditional work of rhetoric, Mackin cites Narratio as "the

circumstances that defined an issue."[16] Thus, traditionally, Narration was considered a definition of what had been described, as for example, a village market scene might first be described generally in visual or spatial terms, then further defined by adding a specific, temporal or sequential account of events at the market in the order in which they occurred. Therefore, Aristotle's Formal cause does coincide essentially with Campbell's Narration, as do Material cause with Description, Efficient with Exposition, and Final with Argumentation.

In case any doubt remains on this crucial point of comparison, we may consider one further group of cagetories, the series of four from which Campbell apparently derived his forms. Howell points out that Campbell's four forms came, by Campbell's own acknowledgement, from Bacon's Four Intellectual Arts: the "Art of Inquiry or Invention," the "Art of Examination or Judgment," the "Art of Custody or Memory," and the "Art of Elocution or Tradition." If we compare these with Aristotle's four causes and Campbell's four forms, we find them all to be complementary. Aristotle's Material cause and Campbell's Description relate to Bacon's Art of Inquiry or Invention. This is, in all three models, the first step, of encountering the matter of the world and extracting or abstracting from it. The second step is the act of further defining what we have extracted; thus, Aristotle's Formal cause, or Campbell's Narration in the sense of definition, or Bacon's Art of Examination or Judgment. (That Bacon meant to include scientific experimentation in this step does not alter the basic similarity.) The third process for all three thinkers is

the one Aristotle called Efficient cause, Campbell Exposition, and Bacon the Art of Custody or Memory, which Howell defines as "a set of directions."[16] All these refer to the creation of sequence in what one has described and defined. Lastly, Aristotle's Formal cause, Campbell's Argumentation, and Bacon's Art of Eloqution finalize the whole process into some sort of commitment or decision. Thus, in the history of these ideas, Campbell may be the direct descendant of Bacon, but both he and Bacon are clearly the indirect descendants of the man against whom they felt compelled to define themselves.

This connection between Aristotle's four causes and Campbell's four forms of discourse serves to clarify Campbell's widely used forms as being processes of prose as well as products. Corbett points out that Campbell originally defined four "ends of discourse," and that these were later expanded to "kinds of discourse."[17] Our present effort expands Campbell's definition yet further, making the four forms general processes of discourse, with the further stipulation that these not only all may be present, but all should be present in a single piece of prose...as causes. The primary end or form of the whole essay must, as Campbell maintained, be descriptive, narrative, expository or argumentative, but in any of these, as Aristotle would have had it, the material, formal, efficient and final causes must be at work. How much description, definition, exposition or argumentation are needed will vary from composition to composition, but an essay with no material, formal, efficient or final causes working will almost certainly be a work without substance, definition, order, or purpose. Thus, rather than extrinsically selected ends or "kinds" of discourse, these four may be

considered intrinsic, inherent "processes" of discourse.

In addition, this redefinition of Campbell's four forms in terms of Aristotle's four causes emphasizes that they are an ordered process, beginning with the most basic and proceding to the most complex. Campbell's four forms are today often used interchangeably, so that a text book like Brooks and Warren's Modern Rhetoric is able to place exposition first, then argumentation, description and narration last.[18] The problem is not that they are used in arbitrary orders, but that they seem to have only an arbitrary order; and indeed, Campbell's terminology somewhat invites this, although both Campbell and Bacon recognized that description or inquiry was the primary type.[19] However, Bacon and Campbell are often not acknowledged or recognized as the sources of the four forms, and so their original intentions are neglected. This is significant, because without an order, the four forms cannot be a unified process by which writing could system atically be taught. Yet such they may be considered, as our examination of their intellectual antecedants reveals. In order of abstraction, description is the most basic or material cause; narration or definition the next step up in abstraction, or the second cause; exposition, the third, efficient cause; and argumentation, the fourth and final cause. Needless to say, these so-called steps should be thought of as totally flexible in practica application, although they are irreduceable in theoretical number and order.[20] In short, Aristotle's four causes re-define Campbell's four forms as a totally elegant formula...just such a formula upon which one would wish to base the building of writing skills.

Our four part model thus seems authoritative and elegant enough to be the foundation for an entire sequence, from remedial, to introductory, to research writing. To begin with, it could be useful in helping the remedial or developmental student approach the formidable problem of constructing correct sentences. In the material or descriptive phase, the student might simply identify or recognize basic correct and incorrect sentences. In the formal or definitive, he would learn definitions of parts of speech, rules of syntax and punctuation, or types of sentences. The efficient or expository step might involve the writing, in a directed, immitative way, of correct sentences. Lastly, the formal or final stage would be the independant authoring of correct sentences, including in Campbell's terms, the ability to argue for their correctness. Once basic sentence skills can be assumed, the model may be used as a graduated process, beginning with the simplest and least abstract whole writing skill...description. After that is mastered, the developmental student will need to deal in some way with higher levels of abstraction, but definition and exposition are likely to be as far as a remedial approach would go. Argumentative writing, being the most sophisticated combination of the others, will probably be left until the standard, introductory Freshman writing course.

A wider range of uses present themselves for instructors teaching introductory writing through the four step process, but also some limitations of the model appear here as well. The major limitation--not present so much in developmental courses, where the student is often there voluntarily through frustration or fear--

is that most introductory writing courses are required. The limitation of the model is motivation, since unless one is motivated by abstract elegance, a student may not be tremendously excited by this spare, four-part formula. Thus the instructor must provide additional motivation, as well as exercises to illustrate and integrate the steps. Of course, grammar review and other rhetorical elements must also be added. However, for the student, the model can provide an easily understandable, believable, and almost automatically memorizable set of steps for pre-writing thought, actual writing, and self-evaluation of writing effectiveness. If the paper has adequate description, definition, order and purpose, he or she can assume it is basically sound. For the introductory teacher, the model provides either a straight semester sequence of skills to cover, or at least a guide if some modular, indirect, intuitive or literary method seems a better motivator than straight sequence. Also, in grading, the instructor has a process roughly equivalent to the standard grading procedure, where all four of the elements present would warrant an A, three (let us say, omitting final purpose) a B, two (omitting order and purpose, for example) a C, only one (omitting all but rough detail) a D. The model also provides the instructor with a set of grading indexes easily understood by students.

Appropriately, the broadest range of uses for the model may come in the most complex course of the standard sequence...research paper writing. Here the major limitation is that the model does not teach specific library and interview methods, nor does it offer a guide to rhetorical refinements of style, or proper proof or form of documentation. These must, again, be created by the instructor.

However, the model does give the beginning and even advanced researcher a guide or list of things to look for in gathering his material. For example, one must first describe the field, then search out key definitions for a formal pivot, then discover the order in one's materials, and finally draw some conclusion. The usefulness of the model becomes more apparent still when the student gets ready to outline his materials before writing. The standard, Roman one, Capital "a," Arabic one outline is helpful only after one has some idea of where one is going. Before using this outline, the student may wish first to describe the problem, then define the formal area of inquiry, then list steps for solution, then state a solution. Now, interestingly enough, the standard outline may be applied, to find out what breakdowns occur within the four basic groupings of material. These four, prescribed groupings may actually fill the Roman numeral slots, with possibly one added for introduction. Then capital letters and Arabic numbers should be relatively easy to fill in. But the basic question of what should go in the Roman numeral headings is less of a mystery when the four-part model has been applied first...before the standard outline. Finally, in writing the full research paper, the model functions as it did in the introductory course, as a checklist for functions to include,and in rewriting.

Thus, having observed how an application of Aristotle's four causes to Campbell's four forms creates an entire sequence for students and teachers, we may conclude by observing that the model fills both the material, formal, efficient and final requirements of/our "new rhetorical age."[21] what Wayne C. Booth has called First, it offers us a variation of a tradítionally accepted system--Campbell's four forms--something intermediate between the comprehensive

classical systems of rhetoric and the fragmented modern attempts at systematization. Without pretending to replace the classical systems, this model clearly defines a series of steps which is minimally simple, irreducible in number and order, yet maximally flexible in application. The model is efficient both in remedial, introductory and advanced research writing courses, because it functions as a graduated, skill-building thinking, writing and re-writing guide. It is, finally, a finite system with infinite possibilities, a subject, if one will, on which all our methods of teaching writing--both analytic and synthetic--could be predicated. Because the model has as sources both Aristotle (and indirectly Plato), as well as Campbell (and indirectly Bacon,) it seems to satisfy convincingly our need for authoritative continuity between the rhetorical tradition begun in antiquity, and the scientific-inductive tradition of our own time.

Plato	Aristotle	Bacon	Campbell
1. Matter	1. Material	1. Inquiry	1. Description
2. Form	2. Formal	2. Examination	2. Narration
	3. Efficient	3. Custody	3. Exposition
	4. Final	4. Eloqution	4. Argumentation

Much work is now needed to find concrete methods of putting into practice this elemental, synthesized formula for writing instruction, in order to create a complete approach. Moreover, just as this stable link exists, others must exist as well. Finding them may be the vital task of our profession in the latter part of this century.

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